

CLOSE SHAVE

The journey to Malaya on the troop ship was quite an experience and the lectures that we had to endure were sometimes quite good.

One of the lectures we had, concerned itself mainly with sex and personal care, the films that we were shown about VD and the like were so horrific that some of the lads, myself included, vowed that to have sex with a woman was not on. If you haven't seen these films then you can be forgiven for not believing what I have just said. The medical officer who was doing this particular lecture even said it would be safer to go with a little boy; I myself did not like that idea at all. Health in the jungle was quite an important thing and cuts and bites had to be looked after and kept clean or infection would set in. So the thing was not to get cut or bitten, quite impossible in my book. Accidents happen, but self inflicted cuts as you might get when you shave was a distinct possibility, so, I decided not to shave in the jungle. One operation, in fact the one I decided not to shave, was with the signals Officer-in-charge of the company, he was a right shithouse, and not liked by anybody, and the wireless operator, whoever he was, had a hard time in his company, still never mind. Off we went into the jungle, to find ourselves a terrorist or two, a long road journey in the three tonners, then on foot to our base camp location, where we duly made contact with HQ for the Sitrep. I Made my basha, got sorted, had a brew and a chat with the boys, nobody was looking forward to the operation with this officer. I was then called by the sergeant together with a couple of other guys and was told we were delegated by the officer to dig the latrines, never before had I dug a toilet and so I went to complain about this duty, I will not go into detail it would take too long to write, but I ended up doing it, even the other lads thought it a bit off, for me to have to dig the shithouse, which reminds me of an incident on another operation with the same officer and another shithouse.

This operation, somewhere in Malaya was to build a landing zone for the helicopters operating in the area. The work was quite good and interesting for me, watching the explosive fixed to the trees and see them crash to the ground, trimming the tree trunks, carrying them to a place in the clearing to make a log platform above ground level and cutting the undergrowth back, all this work was done with axes and saws and our jungle knives. No chainsaws in them days, if there was we did not have them. Then back at the camp I received a message that "SUNRAY" would be arriving in a day or two to see how the landing zone was coming along, now this Colonel was the youngest commanding officer yet, and he was not afraid to speak to his men and let them know what was what, if you know what I mean. Well, if the CO was coming this place had to be tidied up and kept that way. We had to make an impression on the CO, that, we did. We had to make a hut for the CO and all of his accomplishments, somewhere, where they could talk and drink, and yes, a toilet just for the CO. I did not dig or build this one and without my help it was dug, a little hut 3ft by 3ft and 6ft tall with a door, a perch to put your arse on, even a paper holder was fashioned, just for the Colonel. We were all looking forward to seeing the officers turning up or dropping in, in a helicopter on our own landing zone, we had done it. Actually the hut where they all were to be seated was right next to my basha, anyway that evening when they were all talking and drinking in their little hut, the intelligence officer, if I remember the word you use was "ACORN" anyway he leant over to my basha and offered me a choice of a drink, I said "I would like a drop of whiskey please". I placed my mug on the table, he poured and told me to say when, well would you say stop when to stop him pouring? Well he stopped anyway and then offered me the water jug, "No thank you I don't"

He said out loud so everybody heard. "Did you hear that the man doesn't want any water in his whiskey, seems strange to me, still never mind lad, drink up, cheers".

That lot of whiskey lasted me one hell of a time, and I had a good night.

The morning came, I made a call to HQ the usual thing all very boring, made my breakfast and a cuppa, had a rinse in the river, went back to my basha and would you believe it the Colonel was having a shit, not in his own little crapper but sitting with another officer on our pole in our latrine. When he had asked where the latrines were, our hero jumped up to him and told him that there was a special toilet for his own use. "No thank you, I'll go with the men" he said and he left our Major standing and looking in disbelief as he headed for our toilet. The Colonel eventually left and we carried on as before when suddenly a cry of pain and shock filled the air, a crashing sound followed, strange, I wondered what it was, we all wondered what it was, it seemed that our hero had used the private toilet, but the pole and the supporting branches each end had collapsed and he had fallen into the latrine. All covered in dirt and perhaps a little shit, he clambered out of the trench and in doing so pulled some of the leaf wall down, he was well mad, and of

course I was the nearest, and laughing like everybody else, was told to find the Sergeant and whoever made the latrine. What had happened was that the lads in their effort to make it look nice and clean had shaved all the bark off the branches, tied them up as normal, but you see the bark on the branches was rough and did not slide and held firm, remove the bark and bingo, two slippery poles. That Major was so embarrassed and a laughingstock, we all wondered what on earth would have happened if the Colonel had used that latrine?

Sorry about straying away from my little tale, back in the jungle with our hero the Major. "Signaller, have you shaved today?"

"No sir."

"Why not?"

"I've not got a razor sir."

"Well you should have thought that." We were being fired on, he went mad, one of his own signallers could not shave, "You will be the only one here with a beard, apart from the Pioneer Sergeant, it's a bad show, I will not stand for it." I felt like saying; "Bloody well sit down for it then." I did tell him that the MO had said not to shave in the jungle, anyway it was a natural colour for personal camouflage and I did not smell of soap, I smelt evil like everybody else. I was pleased with myself; I had got my own way for fourteen days. I felt a little bit guilty about the other guys who had to shave, but it didn't last long.